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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL PREPARES TO GREET THE WORLD AT THE FIFTH
WORLD WATER FORUM

REF: A. 08 ANKARA 1403
[1](#)B. 08 ISTANBUL 1049
[1](#)C. 07 ANKARA 1996
[1](#)D. ISTANBUL 26

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Over 20,000 people, including many heads of state, are expected to attend the 5th World Water Forum (WWF) in Istanbul on March 16-22. The WWF is the premier international water meeting, held once every three years, and a prime venue to showcase U.S. commitment and leadership on water and sanitation issues. Organizers of the WWF are hoping the "Istanbul Consensus", a document from participating mayors declaring solutions to their water problems, will be a highlight of the forum. The Government of Turkey (GOT) is likely to be challenged on shared water resources with its neighbors as well as internal water management issues. The WWF is also an opportunity for the GOT. Availability of clean water is an important issue in Turkey. Many cities rationed water in the drought of 2007, and the WWF is an opportunity for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to show the domestic audience that it is serious about water issues - a useful message one week before nationwide municipal elections on March 29. Administrative issues could mar the forum as construction of the massive meeting site is still ongoing, forcing organizers to push back the expected completion date to February 14. A shortage of accommodations may be another problem. End Summary and Comment.

The 5th World Water Forum

[1](#)2. (SBU) Istanbul is the site of the 5th World Water Forum (WWF) to be held on March 16-22. Over 20,000 people are expected to come to Istanbul for the premier water and sanitation event that is held once every three years. Invitations for the 5th WWF have gone out to academics, researchers, mayors, legislators, along with 30 heads-of-state, including President Obama. The U.S. delegation is expected to consist of around 40 officials from at least seven agencies. The World Water Council, the permanent administrative structure behind the WWF, along with the GOT and the municipality of Istanbul, formed the 5th WWF Secretariat to administer the event.

The Three Sections of the World Water Forum

[1](#)3. (SBU) The 5th WWF will have three parts: 1) Senior Officials/ Ministerial Process 2) Thematic Sessions, and 3)

Exhibition/Fair. Senior Officials are expected to engage in "high-level" panel discussions to exchange lessons learned and best practices. One innovation of the 5th WWF, according to Ahmet Saatci, Deputy Secretary General of the 5th WWF, will be to establish an "Istanbul Consensus", a non-binding document endorsed by participating mayors that will declare solutions for many water problems. Saatci told us he wants the Istanbul Consensus to achieve meaningful commitments from policymakers to highlight the difference between past WWFs. The Ministerial Process will include a Ministerial Statement. (Note. The WWF is not an officially recognized intergovernmental process; therefore the Ministerial statement is not binding. However, debates at this level have highlighted issues in past WWFs. The issue of water as a human right was first discussed at the Ministerial meeting at the 4th WWF in Mexico City. While this issue was not adopted by the Ministers, a few months later, 116 countries in the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement officially acknowledged the right to water in a May 2006 meeting. End Note.)

¶4. (SBU) Over 100 technical thematic sessions will feature a wide range of water and sanitation-related topics; however, according to Saatci, this will be a reduction from the Mexico City WWF, which featured over 300 technical sessions. Saatci told us he wanted to move away from the traditional format that consisted primarily of technical experts presenting papers. Instead he wants greater interaction between the participants, focusing more on question and answer sessions and less on formal presentations.

¶5. (U) The exhibition area will provide a venue for

governments, non-governmental organizations, and private companies to present their services, products, and activities. There will be an USA Pavilion in the Exhibition Area.

¶6. (U) Lastly, the WWF will include dedicated spaces to develop and expand partnerships and learning centers for training and capacity building.

Past World Water Forums

¶7. (U) Previous WWF venues include Marrakech (1997), The Hague (2000), Kyoto (2003), and Mexico City (2006). Over 15,000 technical experts, policymakers and official delegates from 140 countries attended the WWF in Mexico City. Included in this total were 120 mayors, and 150 legislators. In addition, 78 Ministers attended the Ministerial Conference. The official U.S. delegation to the 4th WWF included 24 officials from 8 different agencies and was led by the Department of State Under Secretary for Global Affairs. More than 60 U.S. government technical experts also participated in the Mexico City meeting.

All Eyes on Istanbul

¶8. (SBU) The 5th WWF is one meeting in a series of international events that will soon be held in Istanbul, including the annual IMF/World Bank meeting in October. Istanbul is one of three cities designated as a Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010. According to Leonard Wolner, U.S. Liaison to the 5th WWF from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the GOT wants to use the conference to show Turkey is a significant player in the region on water issues. To attract greater international buy-in to the forum, according to Wolner, Turkey is willing to discuss transboundary water issues at the Ministerial conference, which will open the debate for Syria and Iraq to criticize Turkey's diversion of waters for domestic purposes. Wolner told us this is a significant concession from the host country, since Turkey could use its position to set the agenda and avoid a potentially embarrassing public debate. Comment: Turkey has and will likely continue to oppose any official or unofficial endorsement of the UN Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The U.S. is also not a party to the convention. End Comment

¶9. (SBU) The GOT is also facing considerable domestic criticism of its handling of water issues in the predominately Kurdish southeastern region. As part of a multi-pronged approach to the Kurdish issue, Prime Minister Erdogan has pledged renewed support for the 30 year-old Southeast Anatolian Project (GAP): a development scheme to generate hydropower and expand irrigation in the Tigris and Euphrates basins. Erdogan has pledged to spend 20 billion TL to complete the project by 2012. According to GOT plans, the GAP will irrigate 1.8 million hectares and generate 27 million kwh of electricity annually. While domestic critics acknowledge the need for government investment in the southeast, some have accused Erdogan of playing pork-barrel politics in the region, without implementing the political and cultural reforms needed to ameliorate the Kurdish issue (ref A).

¶10. (SBU) A successful meeting is also important for domestic consumption since Turkey will be conducting local elections on March 29; exactly one week after the close of the 5th WWF. Istanbul AKP Mayor Topbas has showcased the 5th WWF as part of his administration's attention to water issues. Istanbul is able to satisfy its two million cubic meters of water a day demand, partly by diverting water 150 km from the Melen River; a significant government achievement (ref B). Note: Istanbul was able to avoid water shortages that other Turkish cities, including Ankara, faced in the summer of 2007 (ref C). End Note.

Unfinished Venue Questions Istanbul's Preparedness

¶11. (SBU) Ongoing construction at the primary meeting site raises doubts that the 5th WWF will go on without a hitch.

Wolner told us that the Golden Horn Congress and Exhibition Center, a massive 157,000 square meter facility, which has been undergoing stop-and-go construction for the last ten years, is still weeks away from being completed. The organizers of the Forum removed the primary contractor last fall, which contributed to the delays. Construction has resumed, Wolner told us, but a trial run of the completed site scheduled for January has been postponed to February 14-15.

¶12. (U) Besides finishing the Golden Horn Congress and Exhibition Center, Wolner told us the city is also moving the Old Galata Bridge to connect the two primary WWF sites, which are on opposite banks of the Golden Horn. The city will also provide ferry service from landings on the Bosphorus to the WWF sites two miles up the Golden Horn. According to Environment and Forestry Minister Veysel Eroglu, the budget for the 5th WWF is set at 17.5 million Euros and preparations have been ongoing for two years.

WWF will stretch Istanbul Hotel Capacity

¶13. (SBU) Eroglu and Saatci both anticipate at least 20,000 participants at the Forum, which could cause accommodation shortages in the city (ref D). Istanbul currently has around 18,000 rooms at four and five star hotels and Saatci told us that he is facing an uphill battle with hotel managers who intend to raise room rates for the event. Saatci told us he threatened to bring cruise ships into the Bosphorus to provide additional accommodations to keep prices down. Comment: It is unlikely that cruise ships would be used to augment accommodations at this late date. End Comment. Note: Post has reserved a block of rooms at the Hyatt Regency for the U.S. delegation. Post stands ready to work with Washington to help manage the delegation, as needed. End Note.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) Water problems in Turkey are likely to increase as rapid urbanization places pressures on municipalities, including Istanbul. The 5th WWF provides local and national elected officials an opportunity to discuss real solutions to

this growing problem. The ruling party is likely to take advantage of the date of the Forum to show the public that it is engaged on this topic. Moreover, Prime Minister Erdogan highlighted the importance of water issues last month by telling the press a separate Water Sources Ministry will be created in April.

Wiener